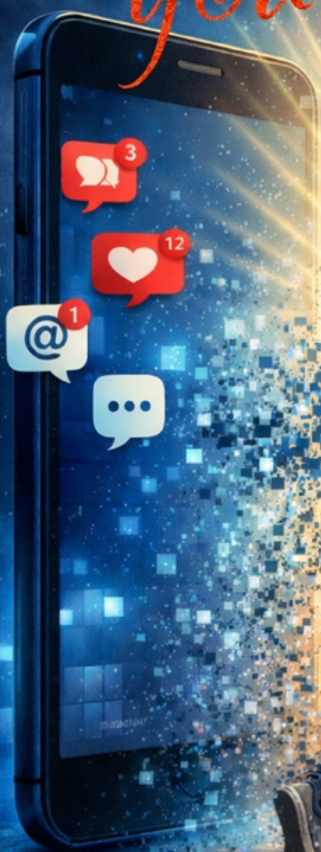


The Authentic *young* Lover



Learning to Love in a Broken Culture

CHRIS HAKIM

THE AUTHENTIC YOUNG LOVER

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Chris Hakim

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You carry a basket of fresh bread on your head,
Yet you search from house to house for crusts.
Knock inside yourself, no other door!

Rumi, *Masnavi* 5

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PREFACE

As for sex, each generation thinks it invented sex; each generation is totally mistaken.

— Robert Heinlein

This book is a digest of *The Authentic Lover* adapted for young adulthood. I produced this for folks who would not take to the style of the original, which is longer, philosophical, and scholarly. In the original you will find deeper wisdom, more nuance, research details, references, a rich bibliography, etc. Yes, depth, nuance, and subtlety matter in love and life!

I spent decades learning these lessons the hard way: through trial and error, heartbreak, and confusion. The hope is that by sharing this wisdom, you might avoid some of those painful detours and find your way to authenticity more quickly.

It is fair to ask whether this will do any good. There are no quick fixes, but I think in the long run you will be better off putting these ideas into application, than ignoring them.

This said, I must acknowledge that many external factors stand in the way of love. If you work 60 hours a week just to stay afloat, no amount of authenticity will overcome this very practical challenge to human connection. Some problems require collective solutions. Access to mental healthcare, affordable housing, living wages, public gathering spaces, and healthcare are political questions requiring policy changes, not just personal growth.

Work on being honest, kind, emotionally mature, and present—that's your responsibility and within your control. At the same time, recognize you're doing this within systems that make relationships materially harder than personal development alone can address.

Don't blame yourself for struggles with structural roots. Conversely don't use structural problems as excuses to avoid personal growth work. Both matter.

This book is meant to stand on its own for you, here and now. If the ideas help you show up more honestly and kindly in your relationships, then it has done its job.

INTRODUCTION

You're at a crossroads. Maybe you're in college, starting your career, or figuring out what comes after high school. You're probably navigating relationships that feel more complex than anything you've experienced before, yet you might also be questioning everything you thought you knew about love, sex, and partnership.

Welcome to one of life's most challenging puzzles. The mainstream relationship advice industry has failed not only a little bit but spectacularly. This can be seen in the rising rates of loneliness, people's disaffection with their partners and with dating, and sexual dysfunction among young adults. We need the courage to say that love is hard, requires sacrifice, and demands the best of our humanity. There just isn't a simple formula that will make us glide through it all.

This is not another dating guide promising to help you "get" someone, nor is it a self-help manual with simple steps to romantic success. Instead, it's an invitation to examine and potentially revolutionize your entire approach to love and intimacy.

Right now, you're living through what might be the most relationship-intensive period of your life. Quite possibly you're meeting new people, exploring your sexuality, dealing with dating apps, navigating hookup culture, and possibly experiencing your first serious heartbreaks.

Or for that matter, you might feel you are experiencing nothing at all while everyone else seems to be having a good time. Either way, you're also under pressure from social media, from your peers, from your family, and from society about how relationships *should* work.

The challenge we all face

Our sexual relationships are sabotaged by four enemies inside us: violence (from coercion to ghosting), pettiness (jealousy, score-keeping), vanity (looks and status obsession), and agenda (using sex to fix loneliness or status or conventional expectations). These aren't external forces but internal patterns, psychological habits and ways

of thinking that we've inherited both from evolution and from our culture.

Most dating advice pretends they don't exist.

You might think, *Violence? That doesn't apply to me!* But **violence** in relationships includes not just physical harm. It also includes emotional manipulation, coercion, lies about birth control, revenge after breakups, and the casual cruelty that can emerge when we're hurt or scared. Even in seemingly *normal* relationships, there's often an undercurrent of power games and emotional harm.

Pettiness is perhaps the most common obstacle you'll face. It shows up as jealousy, keeping score in relationships, trying to make your partner jealous, or treating love like a transaction where you give something to get something back. It's the mindset that reduces love to emotional comfort and avoids the vulnerability that real intimacy requires.

Vanity surrounds you constantly. Dating apps reduce people to photos and short bios. Social media push impossible standards of lifestyle and attractiveness. There's enormous pressure to be "hot enough" or successful enough to be worthy of love. This creates a competitive marketplace where people are ranked and discarded based on external criteria.

Finally, our **reproductive agenda**, the most subtle enemy, includes not just the biological drive to reproduce, but all the ways we use relationships to fill voids in ourselves, to escape loneliness, to prove our worth, or to follow scripts about what our lives *should* look like.

These four enemies are not reasons to despair; they are markers that show you exactly where your practice can begin.

The path forward

Overcoming these enemies gives rise to the four virtues of **gentleness, grace, charm, and mystery**. These aren't things you perform or fake. They're qualities that emerge naturally when you stop letting fear and conditioning drive your relationships.

In this journey, you start from the grossest and end with the subtlest.

This book draws from cutting-edge research in evolutionary

psychology to understand why we act the way we do, combined with wisdom from spiritual traditions from around the world to show us how we can transcend our programming.

You'll find insights from Buddhist meditation practices, Islamic mysticism, Christian contemplation, Hawaiian forgiveness rituals, and medieval European courts of love. This is not because you need to adopt any particular exotic lifestyle, but because human beings across cultures and centuries have grappled with various challenges of human living, and spent centuries developing and refining their wisdom. This collective wisdom is their gift for us to live and love better.

Why this matters now

You're coming of age in an unprecedented time. You have access to more potential partners than any generation in history, yet rates of loneliness and relationship dissatisfaction are skyrocketing. We can connect instantly with anyone in the world, yet many of us report feeling more isolated than ever. We have more freedom to explore our sexuality than previous generations, yet many feel lost without clear, trustworthy cultural scripts to follow.

How to use this book

This book won't tell you what to do. Instead, it will help you develop the inner clarity and confidence to write your own story, one based on authenticity rather than performance, depth rather than surface appeal, and genuine care rather than strategy.

Each section includes contemplative practices. These aren't academic exercises. They're designed to help you recognize these patterns in your own relationships and gradually transform them. Some practices involve meditation, others involve changes in how you communicate or behave. All of them require honesty about your motivations and the courage to be vulnerable.

You don't need to believe everything here or follow every suggestion. Only do yourself the favor of reading with an open mind, especially when something challenges your assumptions. Often, the ideas that initially make us uncomfortable are the ones we most need to hear. At a minimum, it is all an invitation to question your assumptions about love.

There are no shortcuts to the real thing. Love requires the full

development of your character, your emotional intelligence, and your capacity for both independence and intimacy.

This book is a roadmap for that development. If some chapters feel especially challenging or personal, that is usually a sign to slow down, take the practices seriously, and give yourself time rather than a reason to turn away.

PART ONE: VIOLENCE AND GENTLENESS

1. The extent of the problem

When you think about love and relationships, you probably imagine connection, pleasure, intimacy, and happiness. You might think about finding “the one,” about great sex, about feeling understood and cared for. These are lovely aspirations, and they’re absolutely possible.

But we need to start from where we actually are, not from where we wish we were. The reality is that sexuality and relationships are permeated with violence. This isn’t a moral judgment. It’s a factual observation that we need to face honestly if we want to create something better.

Some hard facts

Let’s not tiptoe around this. Sex and romance are not gentle by default. They are among the most dangerous places in human life. They involve desire, jealousy, power, fear of abandonment, and enormous personal stakes. When things go wrong, they can go very wrong.

Psychologists have been studying sexual aggression and coercion for decades, and the results are deeply uncomfortable. In controlled research settings, a disturbingly large minority of men report that they would be willing to force sex under conditions where they believed they would not be caught.* You probably don’t think of your friends as violent criminals—and most of them aren’t—but this research points to something more unsettling: under certain conditions, many ordinary men discover impulses they would rather not admit to. That doesn’t mean they will act on them. It only means the capacity is there.

Women, meanwhile, are not immune from sexually harmful behavior either, though it often takes different forms. Surveys and court cases show that reproductive deception (lying about contraception, sabotaging birth control, or deliberately becoming pregnant against a partner’s wishes) happens far more often than polite society will acknowledge. For the men involved, this can

mean a loss of reproductive control and life-altering consequences imposed without consent.*

The legal system treats these situations unevenly. Men are routinely held financially responsible for children conceived through deception, including cases involving clear absence of consent. These are edge cases, but they matter, because edge cases show you what a system really values.

If this feels uncomfortable, that's understandable. We're looking directly at things we were never taught how to name.

The broader picture

Violence in relationships takes many forms that you might not even recognize as violence. Some forms of relationship violence are so normalized in our culture that you might not even see them as problematic:

Emotional manipulation: using guilt, threats of suicide, or emotional blackmail to pressure someone into sex or to stay in a relationship

Lying about sexual history: exposing partners to STIs without their informed consent

Birth control sabotage: women lying about being on birth control to get pregnant, and men removing or breaking condoms without consent ("stealthing")

Digital abuse: sharing intimate photos without consent, using location tracking to stalk, or using someone's social media accounts to control them

Revenge behaviors after breakups, spreading rumors, sharing private information, or trying to damage someone's reputation or relationships

Coercive sex: pressuring someone who has said no until they give in, or using alcohol or drugs to lower their resistance

Hookup culture pressure the expectation that you should be willing to have casual sex without emotional investment, regardless of your actual feelings or desires

Social media stalking: obsessively checking an ex's social media, or expecting your current partner to be constantly available via text

Ghosting: suddenly cutting off all communication with someone you've been dating, leaving them confused and hurt

Competitive dating: treating relationships like a game where the goal is to "win" someone who doesn't want you, or to make others envious

If you have engaged in any of these behaviors, that does not make you "a monster"; they are patterns that ordinary, decent people can fall into when scared, embarrassed, or trying to avoid uncomfortable conversations.

The cultural context

We have unprecedented access to pornography, much of which normalizes aggression, degradation, and scenarios that blur the lines of consent. Some learn about sex primarily from porn rather than from education or healthy relationships, creating distorted expectations about what is normal or desirable.*

You're also navigating dating in the era of apps, where people are commodified and discarded on a quick swipe. This creates a mindset where human beings are viewed as disposable and interchangeable.

Why this matters

You might be thinking, "This is all really depressing. Why do I need to know about this?"

Simply put, we can't heal what we don't acknowledge. If we pretend that violence isn't a pervasive problem in our relationships, we'll never develop the skills and awareness needed to create truly loving partnerships.

Most of us carry some capacity for this violence within ourselves. Maybe you've never assaulted anyone, but have you ever:

- Continued to pursue someone who clearly wasn't interested?
- Used emotional manipulation to get your way in a relationship?

- Said cruel things when you were angry?
- Pressured someone for sex who seemed reluctant?
- Shared private information about a partner to get sympathy or revenge?

The point isn't to shame ourselves as we recognize any of these behaviors. It is to develop enough honesty and self-awareness to see the violence we're all capable of, so we can choose something different.

The way forward

Working to reduce and eliminate violence in your relationships is the first step toward authentic love. This isn't just about protecting others from harm. It's about freeing yourself from patterns that prevent real intimacy.

Violence, even its subtle forms, creates separation and fear. Love requires vulnerability, trust, and safety. You can't have both violence and genuine intimacy in the same relationship.

The alternative to violence is **gentleness**. If you can engage with others without causing harm, even when you're angry, hurt, or afraid, that is not weakness or passivity. It is strength.

In the following chapters, we'll explore specific practices for developing this gentleness, drawn from meditation traditions, conflict resolution techniques, and the hard-won wisdom of people who have learned to live without violence.

2. Take ownership of your state of mind

You might look at the world around you and think it's a hostile place where you need to be tough to survive. Maybe you've been hurt before and decided the only safe approach is to keep your guard up. Maybe you've absorbed the message that relationships are fundamentally about power and competition.

If you've developed this protective shell, it's understandable. The world can be cruel, especially for young people who are still figuring out who they are and where they belong. But here is the problem: the armor that protects you from being hurt also prevents you from experiencing love.

You cannot change others, but you can change yourself

This might be the most important lesson in this entire book: you have no control over other people's behavior, but you have complete control over your own.

You can't make your ex stop talking badly about you. You can't force someone to love you back. You can't prevent all the jerks in the world from being jerks. But you can decide how you're going to show up in relationships, regardless of how others behave.

If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do.

— M.K. Gandhi

We now have social media that create an illusion that we can and should control how others perceive us. But real transformation happens from the inside out, not from managing one's image or trying to control others' responses.

Owning your state of mind does not mean blaming yourself for other people's actions; it means reclaiming the part of the situation that is actually yours to work with.

The risk of vulnerability

Choosing gentleness means making yourself vulnerable. It means approaching people with an open heart, even though they might hurt you. It means telling the truth, even when lying would be easier. It means treating others with respect, even when they don't treat you the same way.

This feels terrifying, especially when you're young and still figuring out your own worth. What if people take advantage of your kindness? What if they see your openness as weakness? What if you get hurt?

Here's the thing: you will get hurt sometimes. That's part of life and love. But the alternative of staying closed off and defensive guarantees a different kind of suffering: the pain of loneliness and superficial connections.

In the late seventies, the Tibetan Buddhist master Chögyam Trungpa

developed a secular system of spiritual warriorship, which he named after Shambhala, the mysterious, legendary kingdom hidden in the Himalayas. His wish was to share the profundity of Buddhist practice with non-Buddhists. In *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, he describes how humans can either trust and delight in primordial confidence and thus become warriors of the heart, or recoil from it and become cowards. This describes the fundamental choice you face: you can live as a “coward,” always defending yourself against potential hurt, or as a “warrior,” brave enough to face life with an open heart.

A note of caution: this distinction between “warrior” and “coward” is not for judging others but solely for your own guidance and introspection.

Embrace an authentic spiritual tradition

You don’t have to be religious to benefit from spiritual practice, but having some framework for developing kindness and self-awareness is crucial for anyone who wants to love authentically.

Many of us are suspicious of organized religion, often with good reason. But spiritual practice isn’t about dogma or following rules imposed by others. It’s about developing the inner qualities that make life worthwhile: compassion, honesty, patience, forgiveness, and the ability to stay present with difficult emotions.

My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.

— The 14TH Dalai Lama

Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquility. He ordained love and kindness between you.

— Qur’an (30:21)

A man combs his hair every morning; why not his heart?

— Old Chinese saying

The specific tradition you choose matters less than your commitment to actually practicing kindness. This might mean:

- Regular meditation or prayer
- Studying philosophical or spiritual texts
- Participating in a community focused on service or personal

growth

- Engaging in practices like yoga, journaling, or spending time with nature

The key is consistency. Just as you need to exercise regularly to stay physically fit, you need to practice regularly to develop emotional and spiritual strength.

If formal religion is not for you, you can still build a simple, steady practice of reflection and kindness that functions as your personal path.

Mindfulness meditation for beginners

One of the most accessible and scientifically validated practices for developing emotional stability is mindfulness meditation. This doesn't require any particular belief. It's simply training your mind to be more aware and less reactive.

Here's a simple practice you can start with:

- Find a quiet place** where you won't be interrupted for 10–15 minutes. Turn your phone off.
- Sit comfortably** with your back straight but not rigid. You can sit on a chair, cushion, or even on your bed.
- Notice your breath** going in and out. You don't need to change your breathing or focus on it tightly, just to notice it.
- When your mind wanders** (it will), gently bring your attention back to your breath. Don't judge yourself for getting distracted. That is a completely normal part of the practice. Just return to the breath.
- Start with 10 minutes** and gradually increase the time as you get more comfortable with the practice.

The Vietnamese Zen master Thích Nhất Hạnh offers these simple instructions:

Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile. Dwelling in the present moment, I know this is a wonderful moment!

The goal isn't to achieve some special state. It's to develop the

ability to stay present with whatever you're experiencing without being overwhelmed by it. Gently returning to the breath, no matter how distracted, trains you for that.

Many find that regular meditation helps them:

- React less impulsively when they're angry or hurt
- Stay calmer during relationship conflicts
- Be more aware of their motivations and feelings
- Feel more confident and centered in social situations

Nonviolent communication

The psychologist Marshall Rosenberg (1934–2015) developed a method of conflict resolution called nonviolent communication. Instead of trying to prove who's right or wrong, this approach focuses on understanding everyone's needs and finding solutions that work for everyone.

The process has four steps:

Observation (without judgment) Instead of: "You never text me back. You're so rude!" Try: "I sent you three texts yesterday and didn't hear back until this morning."

Expressing feelings Instead of: "You make me feel ignored." Try: "I felt anxious and disconnected after I didn't hear from you." (Also prefer the specific over the general.)

Identifying needs Instead of: "You need to be more responsive!" Try: "I need reassurance that we're okay and that you care about staying connected."

Making a request Instead of: "Don't ignore me anymore!" Try: "Would you be willing to send me a quick text if you're going to be busy, so I know you're thinking of me?"

This approach requires you to:

- Take responsibility for your own feelings instead of blaming the other person
- Get curious about what both you and the other person actually

need

- Look for solutions rather than just venting

You will not sound “scripted” if you adapt these steps into your own language; the point is the structure (observe, feel, need, request), not memorizing exact sentences.

Practice this with smaller conflicts first: roommate issues, family disagreements, or minor relationship tensions. As you get more skilled, you can then tackle more serious problems.

Developing respect for celibacy

This might be the most contrarian idea in this book: in a hypersexualized culture that pressures you to be constantly pursuing or available for sex, choosing periods of celibacy can be a radical act of self-love.

Celibacy doesn’t mean you’re anti-sex or that you’ll never have a lover. It means choosing to step back from sexual activity when it’s not serving your highest good, when it’s causing drama or pain, or when you need time for yourself.

If you are Christian, know that very few parts of the New Testament discuss sex, and nowhere does it say that sex is bad and awful and should be avoided at all costs. The most representative part is when Paul the Apostle recommends celibacy just to keep your life simple and free up more of your energy for religious practice (I Corinthians 7:8–9 and 7:32–35). There is no moral judgement at all.

When you’re constantly focused on dating, hooking up, or relationship drama, it’s hard to focus on your own growth, your education, your career, or your contribution to the world.

Some reasons you might choose temporary celibacy:

- You keep getting into unhealthy relationship patterns and need time to break the cycle.
- You’re dealing with trauma or mental health issues that make relationships difficult.
- You want to focus intensively on school, career development, or creative projects.

- You're tired of the hookup culture and want to wait for something more meaningful.
- You're working on overcoming sexual addiction or compulsive behaviors.
- Celibacy is always a choice, and it's a choice you can change at any time. But practicing periods of celibacy can help you:
- Develop a sense of self-worth that doesn't depend on sexual validation
- Learn to form deep friendships and connections that aren't complicated by sexual tension
- Figure out what you really want in relationships vs. what you think you're *supposed* to want
- Experience your own sexuality as a choice rather than something that controls you

Think of celibacy as taking your hand off the fast-forward button so you can actually notice your patterns and heal what needs healing.

3. Ho'oponopono: the Hawaiian forgiveness ritual

You're going to hurt people, and people are going to hurt you. This isn't pessimism. It's reality. The question isn't whether you'll need forgiveness in your relationships, but whether you'll know how to give and receive it effectively.

Most of us have never learned how to forgive or apologize properly. We might say "sorry" when we bump into someone, but deep forgiveness of the kind that actually heals wounds and restores relationships is a skill that requires practice.

The traditional people of Hawaii developed one of the most effective forgiveness processes ever created. They call it ho'oponopono, which literally means "setting right to right" or restoring natural balance.

Traditional ho'oponopono

In Hawaiian culture, communal harmony is one of the highest values. When conflicts arose between family members or

community members, people would invite a respected elder to facilitate a ho‘oponopono session. Everyone affected by the conflict would gather, and they would work together to:

1. Identify the real problem beneath the surface conflict
2. Allow everyone to express their feelings and perspective
3. Take responsibility for their own part in the situation
4. Offer genuine apologies and make amends
5. Grant forgiveness and commit to moving forward without grudges

The process was based on important Hawaiian values: *laulima*, working cooperatively for the good of everyone; *pono*, justice, righteousness, and hope; *lokahi*, harmony and unity; *lokomakaika‘i*, generosity and goodwill; *malama*, caring for each other; and *aloha*, overriding love and care for others.

Dr. Haertig, who studied this process, called ho‘oponopono “one of the soundest methods to restore and maintain good family relationships that any society has ever devised.”

Modern ho‘oponopono

Morrnah Nalamaku Simeona, a traditional Hawaiian healer, adapted this ancient practice for modern people. Her simplified version focuses on four statements that can be used by anyone to heal past hurts:

I am sorry

Please forgive me

I love you

Thank you

This seems almost impossibly simple, but these four sentences contain profound wisdom.

How to use this practice

If you have been hurt or hold a grudge, you can bring the person

who offended you or harmed you into your mind's eye, and envision the process of forgiveness.

Be willing to forgive, and do not forget your part in the situation, even if you were primarily the victim. Look honestly at how you might have contributed to the situation. Maybe you ignored red flags, or responded to hurt with cruelty, or failed to communicate clearly.

Say the four statements with genuine feeling:

I am sorry. Please forgive me. I love you. Thank you.

Mean what you say This isn't magic words you recite to make problems disappear. You have to genuinely feel remorse, genuinely want forgiveness, genuinely care about the other person, and genuinely feel grateful for the chance to heal.

Asking the offender for forgiveness may seem strange. You may feel convinced about their culpability. In doing that, you may have lapsed from feeling their humanity. So ask for forgiveness for that lapse. Restoring harmony means you are willing to see the other's humanity again. It may be hard, but it will help you. Holding on to a grudge will not. Now the traditional ho'oponopono also has an element of restitution, as appropriate. So of course the onus of forgiveness isn't entirely on the one who was harmed.

Why it works

Ho'oponopono works because it bypasses the ego's need to be right and instead focuses on restoring love and connection. There is no blaming or analyzing who was "more wrong."

This is especially powerful for your our time, where we often get caught up in social media drama, public call-outs, and cancel culture. Instead of trying to shame someone into changing or rallying others to your side, ho'oponopono focuses on healing the relationship itself.

It seems ridiculous to think this short prayer should have any power. It is not a magic formula that may or may not have an effect in the future. Theorizing it will not help, will not help. Just try saying it. The miracle lies in your willingness to try it. Even if you feel no inspiration, just take these simple words to heart, for your and the world's sake:*

I am sorry. Please forgive me. I love you. Thank you.

You may still need boundaries or even legal help in some situations. Forgiving in your heart does not mean putting yourself back into harm's way.

4. What this looks like in practice

When you embody this gentle strength:

- You're genuinely happy for friends when they find love, even if you're single.
- You don't take rejection personally or try to convince people to want you.
- You speak honestly even when it's uncomfortable.
- You set boundaries without being aggressive or defensive.
- You can disagree with someone without trying to hurt them.
- You're curious about others rather than performing for them.

This isn't another personality you put on. It's what emerges naturally when you stop letting fear and insecurity drive your behavior.

Gentleness does not show up only in big, dramatic moments but in very small choices: the text you decide not to send in anger, the joke you don't make at someone else's expense, the extra breath you take before dealing with a hard situation.

Contemplations for Part One

As part of a meditation session or quiet reflection time, choose one of these topics and spend a few minutes thinking about it. Don't try to solve anything or come up with the "right" answer. Just let yourself feel whatever comes up, then return to a few minutes of quiet breathing.

On violence

- Have I pressured someone sexually, even in subtle ways?
- If I'm angry in a relationship, how do I typically express it?

On vulnerability

- What am I most afraid of in relationships?
- How do I protect myself from being hurt, and what does this protection cost me?

On forgiveness

- Is there someone I need to forgive (possibly myself)?
- What would it feel like to let go of a grudge I've been carrying?
- What would be different if I truly believed I am worthy of love, regardless of my mistakes?
- If strong emotions arise during these reflections, pause, feel your breath, and remind yourself that simply noticing these patterns with honesty is already part of changing them.

Pledge of gentleness

When you feel ready, consider making this commitment to yourself:

I solemnly pledge to cultivate gentleness and nonviolence in all my relationships. I will strive to resolve conflicts peacefully and to treat everyone with honesty and kindness. When I make mistakes, I will take responsibility and make amends. I choose love over fear, gentleness over force, truth over convenience.

You can return to this pledge whenever you feel lost or reactive, not as a failure, but as a reminder of the kind of lover and human being you are learning to become.

* Malamuth, Neil M. "Rape Proclivity Among Males." *Journal of Social Issues* 37, no. 4 (1981): 138–57.

* Women "lie, cheat and steal," Manchester Evening News. Accessed August 13, 2025. <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/women-lie-cheat-and-steal-1131837>. For the effect on the unwilling fathers, see Knight, Kathryn. "Four men reveal the trauma of becoming a dad by deception." Mail Online. Accessed August 13, 2025. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2059548/Four-men-reveal-trauma-dad-deception.html>.

* For an honest, courageous, up-to-date, and inclusive book on sex, I wholeheartedly recommend *The Guide to Getting It On!* by Paul Joannides and Daerick Gross Sr.

* If you want to know more about ho'oponopono, I suggest this little book by Ulrich Emil Duprée and Tony Mitton: *Ho'oponopono: The Hawaiian Forgiveness Ritual As the Key to Your Life's Fulfillment*.

PART TWO: PETTINESS AND GRACE

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

— 1 Corinthians 13:4-6

4. Our petty, deadly sins

You've worked on eliminating violence from your relationships. You've stopped pressuring people, you've learned to fight fairly, and you're approaching dating with greater honesty and respect. This is huge progress, and you should feel proud of it.

But there's a new trap waiting for you: the temptation to treat love as nothing more than emotional comfort.

This is where pettiness enters. Pettiness is what happens when you start thinking of love as a feeling that's supposed to make you happy, rather than as a practice that requires your full humanity.

The comfort trap

So many things in modern life provide you with comfort and convenience. You can get almost anything delivered to your door within hours. You can connect instantly with anyone. If you're bored, there are infinite entertainment options. If you don't like something, you can swipe left and find something else.

This creates an expectation that relationships should also be comfortable and convenient. If there's conflict, or you have to work at communication or compromise you might assume you are with the wrong person. If you feel anything other than happy and satisfied, you are tempted to look for someone else.

But love isn't a consumer product designed for comfort. Love is what emerges when two whole human beings choose to share their lives, with all the messiness and challenge that goes with it.

Love will often feel warm and easy, but if you treat feeling good as the main measure of whether a relationship is worth it, you will

walk away from some of the very situations in which you could grow the most.

What pettiness looks like

Pettiness shows up in many ways in modern relationships:

Keeping score: “I always text first,” “I paid for the last three dates,” “I gave you a birthday gift but you didn’t get me anything,” “I’m always the one who has to initiate sex.”

Social media drama: Getting upset because your partner liked someone else’s photos, posting cryptic messages about your relationship, or carefully curating your online presence to make an ex jealous.

Treating relationships like transactions: “If I do this, they should do that.” “I’ve been really nice to them, so they owe me sex/commitment/attention.”

Avoiding difficult conversations: Breaking up via text, ghosting, or just hoping problems will resolve themselves rather than having honest discussions.

Playing games: Making someone jealous intentionally, withholding affection as punishment, or saying things you don’t mean to get a reaction.

Demanding constant reassurance: Needing your partner to constantly prove their love, getting upset when they want alone time, or interpreting normal mood changes as signs they don’t care about you.

Identity fusion: Losing yourself in relationships, expecting your partner to complete you, or feeling like you can’t be happy unless they’re happy.

The evolution of pettiness

To understand why these patterns are so common, it helps to know where they come from. Evolutionary psychologists have identified several inherited tendencies that served our ancestors well but create problems in modern relationships:

Jealousy and possessiveness

Your jealous feelings exist because throughout human history, people who didn't guard their mates often lost them to competitors. Men who weren't vigilant risked raising other men's children. Women who didn't ensure their partners' commitment risked losing resources needed to raise children.

David Buss and his colleagues identified common “mate retention” behaviors that people use to keep partners from straying:

- Vigilance (checking their phone, asking where they've been)
- Concealment (discouraging them from going out with friends)
- Monopolization of time (always wanting to be together)
- Jealousy induction (flirting with others to make them jealous and insecure)
- Emotional manipulation (threatening to leave, giving the silent treatment)
- Resource display (expensive gifts, showing off your status)
- Possessive signals (public displays of affection, couple photos on social media)

Notice how many of these behaviors are considered normal in your peer group? That's because they're evolutionary holdovers that feel “natural,” even though they often damage relationships.

Drama and stonewalling

When there is conflict, some people escalate emotionally, getting louder, more dramatic, bringing up past grievances, until they get their way. Others shut down completely, giving the silent treatment, refusing to engage, or just walking away.

Both of these strategies can be effective in the short term, which is why they persist. But they prevent the kind of honest communication that creates real intimacy.

The gender trap

You've probably absorbed cultural messages about how men and women are “supposed” to behave in relationships. Men should be stoic, providers, and sexually aggressive. Women should be

nurturing, emotional, and focused on commitment.

These rigid roles prevent both men and women from being fully human in relationships. Research consistently shows that men and women are far more similar than they are different in their psychological needs and capabilities.

The victim/perpetrator cycle

There is often a tendency to see every relationship conflict in terms of victim and perpetrator. Someone is always the bad guy, and someone is always innocent. Social media encourages this with public call-outs and pile-ons.

But in real relationships, both people often contribute to problems in some way. This doesn't mean abuse victims are responsible for their abuse. It simply means that many conflicts involve two imperfect people doing their best and sometimes failing.

Learning to see your own role in relationship problems without taking full blame, and to hold others accountable without demonizing them, is a crucial skill for lasting love.

If you notice that conflict in your relationship turns into either high-intensity drama or cold silence, that is a sign that pettiness has taken over. Then maybe it is time to step back, breathe, and ask what you are actually afraid of losing.

5. Overcoming pettiness

The antidote to pettiness is what we'll call **grace**, the capacity to think and act from a larger perspective than just your immediate comfort or convenience.

Grace means:

- Caring about your partner's wellbeing as much as your own
- Working for the good of the relationship, not just for getting your way
- Responding to conflict with curiosity rather than defensiveness
- Accepting that love sometimes requires sacrifice and compromise

- Seeing problems as opportunities to grow closer rather than reasons to break up

Compassion

The Dalai Lama teaches:

Some people consider the practice of love and compassion is only related to religious practice and if they are not interested in religion they neglect these inner values. But love and compassion are qualities that human beings require just to live together.

Compassion starts with recognizing we're all dealing with our own fears, insecurities, and past wounds. The person who seems confident might be terrified of abandonment. The person who seems aloof might be protecting themselves from past heartbreak. The person who seems demanding might feel invisible and unworthy of love.

This doesn't excuse harmful behavior, but it helps you respond with understanding rather than just reaction.

Practice: understanding your partner's world

Next time you're frustrated with someone, try this:

Assume positive intent: What if their annoying behavior comes from a place of care, fear, or past hurt rather than malice?

Get curious: Instead of "Why are you being so clingy?" try "I notice you seem to need a lot of reassurance lately. What's going on?"

Share your own vulnerability: "When you check my phone, I feel like you don't trust me, and that makes me want to pull away. Can we talk about what you're worried about?"

Look for the need under the behavior: If they're jealous, they might need security. If they're distant, they might need space. If they're critical, they might need appreciation.

This shift is not about suppressing your needs; it is about putting character and clarity first, trusting that healthy love will never require you to abandon yourself.

The Practice of tonglen

There is a powerful Tibetan Buddhist meditation called *tonglen* (giving and receiving) for developing compassion. It normally requires a solid grounding in mindfulness meditation, so do not rush into it without developing your mindfulness practice first. Better yet, get help from someone experienced.

Here's how to do it:

Sit quietly for a while.

Think of someone who is suffering. It doesn't have to be relationship stuff.

Breathe in their pain: Imagine breathing in their jealousy, their fear, their anger, their hurt. Really let yourself feel it.

Breathe out relief: Imagine breathing out love, peace, and understanding toward them, whatever they need to feel better.

Expand the practice to all beings: gradually address larger group of people, animals, and all living things. Extend happiness to all beings, as you take on their suffering.

Continue for a short few minutes, literally breathing in suffering and breathing out relief. It doesn't need to be for very long at all.

This sounds counterintuitive. Why would you want to take on someone else's pain? What happens is that your own heart opens. You stop seeing another as your enemy and start seeing them as another human being struggling with the same basic fears you struggle with.

The Tibetan Buddhist teacher Traleg Kyabgon explains:

It is a training in courage, because the whole point of doing it is to train ourselves to be less fearful and anxious... This practice is so extremely beneficial because we're training ourselves to stop thinking about everything from a defensive posture.

Envision an enlightened society

Instead of just focusing on your own relationship happiness, try thinking about what kind of world you want to live in. What would our culture look like if everyone prioritized kindness over getting what they want? What would hookup culture look like if everyone cared about their partners' emotional wellbeing? What would social

media look like if people used it to build each other up rather than compete?

You can start creating that world in your own relationships and in all places. Every time you choose generosity over selfishness, honesty over manipulation, or patience over immediate gratification, you're modeling a better way for your friends and peers.

Break gender role expectations

One of the most gracious things you can do is refuse to limit yourself and your partner based on gender stereotypes.

This might mean:

- Men learning to express emotions and ask for support
- Women feeling free to initiate sex and assert their needs
- Everyone sharing financial responsibilities based on means rather than gender
- Supporting friends who don't fit traditional gender expressions

Research by Dr. John Gottman shows that the happiest couples are those who share power and decision-making, regardless of gender. Relationships based on equality rather than traditional roles are more satisfying for everyone.

6. Courtly love: learning from medieval romance

Medieval European courts developed one of the most sophisticated philosophies of love in history. Many of their insights are directly relevant to today's challenges.

Even if the historical details feel distant or idealized, you can treat courtly love stories as thought experiments: what happens when people decide that how they love matters as much as whether they “win” at love?

From the 12th century onward, European nobles created “courts of love”: not real courts, but councils or salons that would hear disputes between lovers and establish principles for how romantic relationships should work. These weren't just academic exercises;

they were practical attempts to figure out how to love each other better.

Here are some of their key insights, translated for modern relationships:

Exclusivity freely given, not demanded

The troubadour Arnaut de Mareuil wrote:

I cannot share my heart, for in my mind the one who bids for love in two places is a liar and an impostor in each place.

But the courts of love also contradicted themselves!

- No one can really love two people at the same time.
- Nothing prevents one lady being loved by two gentlemen, or two gentlemen by one lady.

Earlier we saw that jealousy can produce aberrant behaviors, to the point of making a good situation uninteresting or even intolerable. Jealousy is the product of evolution and even **feels natural**, but **evolution doesn't care** about your love life.

So getting a grip on your jealousy will go a long way toward making things better. Is your partner about to cheat on you, or are you just being overly proactive?

Perhaps then exclusive commitment should be offered freely, and not demanded, when both partners are ready. Don't try to lock someone down who isn't enthusiastically choosing you. When you do choose exclusivity, embrace it wholeheartedly.

Authenticity over performance

Bernard de Ventadour lamented:

Ah God! If one could distinguish sincere lovers from the fakes, and if flatterers and cheats wore horns on the forehead! I would have given all the gold and silver in the world, if I had them, for my lady to recognize the sincerity of my love for her.

This speaks directly to our modern challenges with social media performance and dating app profiles. The courts of love valued sincerity above all: not trying to be impressive, but being genuinely

yourself and genuinely caring about the other person.

Selflessness and service

The courts developed the ideal that love should transform one for the better.

A knight asked: "If I sing for you and offer you my services, may I not expect benefits therefrom?"

The lady replied: "You will have success, do not doubt; you will not remain without recompense."

"How do you understand it, O noble lady?"

"That you are more noble, and also full of confidence."

In modern terms: the reward for loving someone isn't getting something from the other, but becoming a more noble version of yourself through the practice of loving.

Equality and mutual respect

The modern remnant of courtly love is the idea of "chivalry," which requires a man to perform all sorts of services, offer free dinner and other expensive dates, etc. in hope of gaining a woman's favor. This was the case in the medieval literature because the knights were not of high social rank compared with the noble ladies they pursued. The knight thus made himself the lady's servant, hoping for a share of her nobility.

The troubadour Gui d'Ussel challenged the idea that one person in a relationship should be subordinate to the other:

Lady, it's a shameful opinion for a lady to defend that she will not hold as equal the one with whom she's made one heart of two.

This was radical thinking for its time, and it's still relevant now. The healthiest relationships are partnerships between equals, not hierarchies where one person serves the other.

Moderation and reason

Bernard de Ventadour taught:

He who can keep Measure can boast of courtesy. He who wants to comprehend all and accumulate all that he sees, needs to reduce

excess in all, or else he will never really be courteous.

This wisdom applies directly to modern dating culture. If you're constantly trying to have every option available, constantly upgrading to someone better, or constantly demanding more from your partners, you'll never be satisfied with anyone.

Privacy and decorum

The courts of love despised gossip and slander. They even had a word: *lauzengier* for people who maliciously spread rumors in order to undermine others' love lives.

This is incredibly relevant in the age of social media. The courts of love well understood that love needs privacy to flourish. When you put all your relationship business online, you invite everyone to have opinions and judgments that can poison your connection.

Forbearance

The courts acknowledged that love involves suffering. This isn't necessarily a problem to be solved. The troubadour Albertet de Sisteron wrote:

Those who love as impostors do not feel the suffering of love, and one cannot have great value without suffering and sorrow; no one can have merit without vexation and sacrifice.

This doesn't mean you should stay in abusive or harmful relationships. It means that all meaningful relationships involve some discomfort, compromise, and working through problems. If you expect love to be easy all the time, you'll keep moving on as soon as things get challenging.

7. How to kiss like in the movies

Take something as simple as a first kiss. In movies, the man usually just goes for it: he grabs the woman and kisses her, she resists for a moment, then melts into his arms. This scenario is so common that many people think it's how real-life romance should work.

But real life is more complicated. How do you know when someone wants to be kissed? How do you show interest without being pushy? How do you handle consent without killing the mood? And if you wait too long, waiting too will kill the mood. It's actually a very delicate point.

The problem with the movie kiss

The movie kiss scenario creates several problems:

- It puts all the pressure on one person — *the man* — to know exactly when the other person is ready.
- It romanticizes ignoring someone's resistance.
- It makes asking for consent seem unromantic.
- It assumes that if you're attracted to someone, they must be attracted to you.

Sex educator Clarisse Thorn points out that this creates a genuine dilemma. Some believe you should always ask before kissing someone for the first time. Others believe that asking ruins the spontaneity and romance. Some women say they would refuse to kiss a man simply because he asked, because asking shows unmanly uncertainty and lack of confidence.

Here is a better approach, adapted from the world of pickup artists but without manipulation: move 90% of the way toward the kiss, and let the other person come the other 10% if they want.

In practice, **you build physical connection gradually**: Start with light touches: a hand on the arm during conversation, sitting close enough that your legs touch, brief hugs when you greet each other.

Pay attention to their response: Do they touch you back? Do they maintain the physical contact or pull away? Do they seem comfortable with your proximity?

Create the opportunity: When you're having a good moment together. Maybe you're laughing about something, or having a deep conversation, or just looking at each other. Move closer.

Man or woman, move 90% of the way: Lean in slowly until you're close to their lips, and pause there. Make your intention clear, but leave space for them to respond.

Let them choose: If they want to kiss you, they'll close the final distance. If they don't, they'll pull back or turn away, you haven't crossed any boundaries, no big deal.

This approach respects consent and also preserves spontaneity. It's clear communication without awkward verbal negotiation. It shares the responsibility rather than putting all the pressure on one person.

And yes, both boys and girls can absolutely initiate a kiss.

Beyond the first kiss

The same principle applies to all physical intimacy: move slowly, pay attention to your partner's response, and leave room for them to say no.

This doesn't just prevent unwanted contact. It actually creates a better experience for both partners. When you know your partner is enthusiastically participating rather than just going along, the intimacy is much more satisfying.

Grace in physical intimacy

Approaching physical intimacy with grace means:

- Caring more about your partner's comfort than your own gratification
- Being willing to slow down or stop if they're not ready
- Communicating about what you both enjoy rather than relying on assumptions
- Taking responsibility for birth control and safer sex: definitely talk about it!
- Staying present and connected rather than just focusing on physical sensations

8. What this looks like in relationships

When you embody this gracious approach to love:

- You enjoy the process of becoming a better partner, not just the results.
- You find satisfaction in making your partner happy, not just in getting what you want.
- You're excited about working through problems together rather

than dreading conflict.

- You feel energized by the challenge of loving someone.
- You're generous with affection, attention, and care because it feels good to give.
- You're grateful for the opportunity to love and be loved, even when it's complicated.

This isn't forced positivity or pretending problems don't exist. It's genuine enthusiasm for the project of learning to love.

Contemplations for Part Two

On pettiness

- What are my most common relationship complaints, and how might they reflect my own fears or insecurities?
- When do I treat love like a transaction ("I did this, so you should do that")?
- How do I handle disagreements: do I try to win, or do I try to understand?

On grace

- How can I care for my partner's wellbeing even when I'm upset with them?
- What would it look like to approach relationship problems as opportunities to grow closer?
- When have I experienced true generosity in love, either giving or receiving?

On compassion

- Can I see my partner's difficult behaviors as expressions of their own pain or fear?
- How might I respond differently to conflict if I assumed positive intent?
- What would it be like to love someone without trying to change

them?

PART THREE: VANITY AND CHARM

The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it,
makes me sick!

— Charles Darwin

9. What is attractiveness?

You've learned to approach relationships without violence and pettiness. You're communicating honestly, treating people with respect, and working to resolve conflicts constructively. This is very significant progress.

But there's another obstacle waiting, one that might be the most challenging of all: our culture's obsession with attractiveness and your own role in perpetuating it.

A hierarchy of attractiveness

Let's be honest about how modern dating actually works. Whether you're on Tinder, at a party, or in class, people are constantly ranking each other based on attractiveness. Everyone knows who the "tens" are and who's settling for whom.

This isn't just shallowness. It's based on real, measurable preferences that are remarkably consistent across cultures and time periods.

The psychologist David Buss conducted massive studies across 37 cultures* and found the following trends:

Men consistently prefer:

- Physical attractiveness (clear skin, symmetrical features, healthy weight)
- Youth (women younger than themselves)
- Signs of fertility and health

Women consistently prefer:

- Economic resources and earning potential

- Ambition and social status
- Maturity (men older than themselves)

The biological basis

These preferences aren't arbitrary or created by the media. They're deeply rooted in evolutionary history. Men are attracted to signs of fertility because throughout human history, men who mated with fertile women were more likely to pass on their genes. Women are attracted to status and resources because women with high-status partners were more likely to successfully raise children.

The male preferences for “full lips, clear skin, smooth skin, clear eyes, lustrous hair, good muscle tone, a bouncy youthful gait, animated facial expression, and high energy level” are remarkably universal.* And the “ideal” female waist-to-hip ratio has remained nearly constant at 0.7 across decades and cultures.

Similarly, women's preferences for tall, confident, and successful men appeared across all cultures studied. Bear in mind that these are just statistical tendencies. What this shows is not that we are “hard wired” and cannot do anything about attraction at all. It shows that those tendencies exist regardless of the culture we live in.

The problem of competition

Please accept my resignation. I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member.

— Groucho Marx

Here's where this becomes a serious obstacle to love: in any given population, there is remarkable consensus about who is most attractive. Everyone wants the same people.

Studies by Kenrick and others show that for marriage, women on average require men to be in the 68TH percentile for earning capacity. That means two-thirds of men are considered inadequate husband material based on income alone. Men require women to be in the 61ST percentile for physical attractiveness, meaning 60% of women are considered unsuitable for marriage based on looks alone.*

Think about this: the average person (who is by definition average

in attractiveness, income, intelligence, etc.) wants a partner who is significantly above average.

The approach disadvantage

In speed-dating experiments, researchers found that the person being approached has a tactical advantage regardless of gender. Simply by having to make the first move, you're showing you are more willing that the person being approached, automatically signaling that you consider them more attractive than yourself. This often ensures rejection, regardless of your potential as a pair.

The pressure cooker

This system creates enormous pressure on everyone:

For women:

- Constant anxiety about physical appearance
- Eating disorders and body dysmorphia
- Feeling reduced to sexual objects
- Pressure to maintain youthfulness and beauty as they age
- Competition with other women
- Feeling like they can't eat normally, age normally, or be seen without makeup

For men:

- Intense pressure to achieve financial success
- Feeling worthless if they're not high earners
- Competition with other men for status
- Pressure to be stoic and emotionally unavailable
- Fear of showing vulnerability or neediness
- Feeling like their worth is tied to their productivity and resources

The irony of it all

Here's the cruel irony: the more successful and powerful women become, the more demanding their standards get. A study of female medical students and feminist leaders shows that high-achieving women want "super-powerful" men, "very rich" or "brilliant" or "genius" partners.*

So it's not that women prefer high-status men because they lack their own power. Attraction to status appears to be innate, regardless of women's own achievements.

The social media amplification

- We face these pressures more intensely than ever because of social media and dating apps.
- Impossible beauty standards through filters and curation
- People reduced to photos and stats, emphasizing superficial qualities
- Seemingly infinite options that create the illusion that you can always find someone better
- Constant and public social comparison
- Success in dating as a measure of social status

The disposability problem

When people are ranked primarily on attractiveness, everyone becomes disposable. There's always someone younger, prettier, richer, or more successful.

This creates relationships based on insecurity rather than genuine connection. People stay together not because they love each other, but because they're afraid they can't do better. Or we constantly look for upgrades rather than investing in the person we're with.

The cost

The pursuit of conventionally attractive partners often prevents us from recognizing genuine affinity when we find it. We might overlook someone who would be a wonderful partner because they don't meet conventional criteria. Or we might chase someone who

looks good in theory but who doesn't actually make us happy.

Moreover, relationships based primarily on attraction tend to be unstable. Looks fade, finances change. If that is the main foundation of our connection, the relationship will crumble sooner or later.

10. The problem of the peacock

Charles Darwin was puzzled by peacocks. If evolution is about survival of the fittest, why would male peacocks develop such elaborate tail feathers? These colorful feathers don't help them survive. In fact, they make it harder to fly and predators can catch them more easily.

Darwin coined the term "sexual selection" to explain this phenomenon. Peahens prefer males with more colorful tails, so over generations, males developed increasingly elaborate plumage to attract mates. The advantage in reproduction came at the expense of the ability survive.

Humans have the same problem.

The peacock effect in human dating

Modern dating culture is essentially a giant peacock display. Everyone is trying to signal their attractiveness through:

Physical displays:

- Gym memberships
- Cosmetic procedures and beauty treatments
- Designer clothes and accessories
- Professional photography for dating profiles

Status displays:

- Expensive cars, watches, and gadgets
- Exotic travel photos
- Exclusive restaurant dinners
- VIP club access and expensive hobbies

Social media performance:

- Carefully curated feeds showing only highlights
- Strategic posting to maximize likes and comments
- Networking with attractive or successful people for social proof
- Constant optimization of “personal brand”

In the short term, this helps you get matches on dating apps or attention at parties. But it also:

- Consumes enormous time, money, and mental energy
- Creates anxiety about maintaining a particular image
- Attracts people who are interested in what you can provide rather than who you are
- Sets up relationships based on performance rather than authenticity

The cost

Young people go into debt buying things they can't afford to impress people they don't know. They work jobs they hate to afford lifestyles designed to attract partners. They sacrifice their health, relationships, and values in pursuit of success to be more attractive.

The pressure to display attractiveness and status is literally destroying the planet. The fast fashion industry, driven largely by the need to constantly update our appearance, is one of the world's biggest polluters. The luxury goods industry markets products primarily as status symbols rather than functional items. Sometimes the quality is even shoddy, the value being mostly in the bling effect.

The paradox of choice

Dating apps promise to give you access to more potential partners than ever before, but research shows that having too many options actually makes people less happy with their choices. When you have hundreds of potential matches, you become:

- More picky and demanding

- Less likely to commit to anyone
- Constantly wondering if there's someone better
- Less satisfied with the people you do date, as you forgo all other options

This is called choice paralysis or the paradox of choice. It's why some people can spend hours swiping on dating apps but only rarely actually go on dates, or why they go on many first dates but rarely pursue second ones.

Having too many options creates choice paralysis and makes people less satisfied with whomever they choose. Maybe you should have picked someone else, who knows?

The comparison trap

Social media creates a constant stream of comparison opportunities. You see your ex with someone new who seems more attractive than you; friends in relationships that look perfect online; and influencers living seemingly ideal lives.

This creates a perpetual sense of inadequacy. No matter how attractive or successful you are, there's always someone who appears to be doing better. The goalpost keeps moving.

Performance exhaustion

Maintaining an attractive image is exhausting. It requires constant vigilance about your appearance, your social media presence, and your lifestyle choices. You can never fully relax or be yourself because you're "always on."

This is hard for women, who face pressure to be attractive but not vain, sexual but not slutty, confident but not intimidating. But it's also difficult for men, who are expected to be successful but not materialistic, confident but not arrogant, emotionally available but not needy.

The intimacy problem

Perhaps most importantly, when you're focused on maintaining an attractive image, it's very difficult to be genuinely intimate with someone. Intimacy requires vulnerability, honesty, and letting your

imperfections show. The attractiveness game requires the opposite: always presenting your best self and hiding anything that might lower your perceived value.

This creates relationships that feel shallow and unsatisfying, even when you're with conventionally attractive people. You can never feel truly known or loved for who you are.

11. Approaches to overcoming vanity

The solution to vanity isn't to stop caring about your appearance or to settle for anyone who will have you. The solution is to develop what we'll call *charm*, a quality that attracts people to your authentic self rather than to your performance. You will find that it's hard, and that most known solutions are imperfect or incomplete. And even though no perfect solution has been found, it is worth exploring what has been tried. This helps pin the problem down better.

The principled artist's approach

One approach is to simply refuse to play the attractiveness game. Like artists who won't compromise their vision for commercial success, you could decide to be completely authentic and wait for someone who appreciates the real you.

This is admirable in principle, but it can be lonely in practice. If everyone around you is playing the game and you're not, you might find yourself without options for long periods. The world may not be ready for, or even notice, your authenticity.

However, this approach does build genuine self-respect and ensures that anyone who is attracted to you is attracted to the real you. It's quality over quantity.

The strategic approach

Pickup artists have developed sophisticated methods for competing in the attractiveness marketplace. They study and systematically cultivate qualities that women find attractive.

This can actually be helpful if approached ethically. Understanding social dynamics, improving your conversation skills, taking care of your physical health, and developing confidence are all valuable.

The problem with the pickup community is that it often focuses on manipulation rather than genuine self-improvement. It teaches men to see women as targets to be conquered rather than human beings to connect with. This is of course a fatal limitation.

But the core insight is valid: attractiveness isn't entirely fixed. You can be more attractive by developing social skills, emotional intelligence, physical health, and personal style.

The medieval poet's solution

The medieval courts of love had an interesting approach to this problem. They recognized that love often involved people of different social status, and they developed elaborate codes to manage these dynamics.

The key insight was that true love should ennoble both people, i.e. make them better versions of themselves. The troubadour Marcabru, who was of humble birth, found happiness by "mingling with women of the people" rather than chasing high-status partners:

I might better spend the time with women of the people. Wherever I go there are many of them, and I find the one who wants me. She is my heart's delight. What good is too high a goal?

Here is a radical alternative: instead of upgrading your own attractiveness in a conventional way to win conventionally attractive partners, you could choose to value different qualities entirely.

Creating an alternative culture

Perhaps the most powerful approach is to create a social circle that values different qualities than mainstream dating culture.

You could cultivate friendships with people who:

- Value kindness, intelligence, and creativity over conventional attractiveness
- Value personal growth and meaningful conversations
- Share your values about how relationships should work
- Support each other's authentic self-expression rather than competing

This doesn't mean settling for people you're not attracted to. It means developing attraction based on the full spectrum of human qualities rather than just the same, tired ones.

12. The ahal of the Tuareg

To see what an alternative dating culture might look like, let's examine a fascinating historical example: the *ahal* of the Tuareg people of North Africa. The Tuareg are a nomadic people who developed a unique approach to romance that directly addressed many of the problems we face today.

How the ahal worked

The ahal was a formalized social gathering where young, unmarried people would come together to find romantic partners.

A typical ahal would work like this: young people would dress in their finest clothes and gather in the evening. The group elects a "queen" (soltana) and maybe also a "king" (soltan) to enforce etiquette. People would share poems, songs, and stories, often improvised. There would be games, verbal sparring, and playful competition.

Here's what made it special:

Frowning on jealousy: Jealousy was actively discouraged and mocked. If someone showed possessiveness, the group would make fun of them.

Intellectual and artistic focus: The ahal centered around poetry, music, and verbal sparring. People impressed each other with wit, creativity, and intelligence rather than physical appearance or material possessions.

Inclusive participation: You would never show preference for just one person, but should appreciate everyone present. A man who said he loved only one woman would be ridiculed and forced to pay a penalty, usually in the form of a dare.

Grace under pressure: When people tried to insult or embarrass their romantic rivals, it had to be done with extraordinary grace and humor. Anyone who responded with crude language or lost their temper would be excluded.

What made it work

Several features of the ahal directly addressed the problems of modern dating:

It reduced competition by requiring people to show appreciation for everyone, not just the most attractive individuals.

It valued qualities that don't fade with age: intelligence, creativity, humor, grace under pressure.

It created a safe space for flirtation and courtship without the pressure of immediate commitment.

It built community rather than just pairing people off. Even if you didn't find a romantic partner, you had a good time and strengthened social bonds. Sometimes older and married women would also attend to see that the correct values were being transmitted.

Modern applications

You can't create the exact cultural context of the ahal, but you could create something similar:

Host regular gatherings focused on creative expression: poetry nights, storytelling circles, music sessions, or creative writing groups.

Establish group norms that discourage competition and encourage appreciation for everyone's unique qualities.

Create opportunities for playful interaction without the pressure of formal dating.

Getting to know people's minds and personalities before focusing on physical attraction.

Celebrate wit, creativity, and emotional intelligence rather than just conventional metrics.

13. The peacock redeemed

There is a way to transform the very quality that seems most problematic (vanity) into something beautiful and powerful.

In ancient Indian symbolism, the peacock represents the ability to transform poison into medicine. According to legend, peacocks eat snakes and scorpions, and their beautiful feathers come from transmuting this poison into something gorgeous.

Using vanity as fuel

Instead of trying to eliminate your desire to be attractive, you can use it as motivation for genuine self-improvement. The key is to focus on qualities that actually make you a better person and partner, rather than just superficial improvements.

Real attractiveness comes from:

- Physical health and vitality (which requires taking genuine care of your body)
- Emotional stability and maturity (which requires working on yourself)
- Intellectual curiosity and growth (which requires reading and learning)
- Social skills and empathy (which requires practicing relating to others)
- Creative expression and passion (which requires developing your talents)
- Generosity and kindness (which requires thinking beyond yourself)

These qualities not only make you more attractive, they also make you happier and more fulfilled as a person. They're improvements that serve both your own wellbeing and your capacity to love others.

Beyond the beauty standard

You can also expand your definition of attractiveness to include qualities that advertising and social media ignore:

- The way someone's face lights up when they talk about something they love
- How safe and comfortable you feel in someone's presence

- Their ability to make you laugh or see things differently
- How they treat people who can't do anything for them
- Their curiosity about the world and willingness to learn
- How they handle stress, disappointment, and conflict
- Their capacity for growth and self-reflection

These qualities tend to increase rather than decrease over time, creating the foundation for relationships that get better with age.

Basic goodness

The Shambhala tradition teaches that every human being possesses *basic goodness*, an inherent worthiness that doesn't depend on achievements, appearance, or external validation.

Recognizing this basic goodness in yourself means you don't need to earn love through performance. You're worthy of love simply because you exist. This gives you the confidence to be authentic rather than having to be impressive.

Recognizing basic goodness in others means you can see their inherent worth regardless of their mojo or conventional attractiveness. This opens up possibilities for connection that you might miss if you're only focused on surface qualities.

Two practices for overcoming vanity

Garuda's breath

This meditation helps you work with the intense emotions around attraction and rejection.

- Imagine someone you find extremely attractive, someone you would really like to be with. Picture them clearly in your mind.
- As you breathe in, imagine this person accepting you, wanting to be with you, choosing you over everyone else. Feel the elation and excitement.
- As you breathe out, imagine this person rejecting you, choosing someone else, being completely uninterested in you. Feel the disappointment and pain.

- Continue alternating these experiences with each breath for 5–10 minutes.

What you'll notice is that both the high of acceptance and the low of rejection are temporary mental states. They're both based on external circumstances you can't control. By experiencing both repeatedly, you begin to see their insubstantial nature and develop equanimity about both outcomes. Notice the part of your mind that is unswayed by the ups and downs. Your charm lives there.

The prince and the beggar

This practice helps you work with status differences and social hierarchy.

- Imagine someone you're attracted to as a prince or princess in full regalia, being paraded through the streets in a magnificent procession. See them as elevated, important, worthy of attention and admiration.

- Now imagine yourself as a beggar in rags, standing in the crowd, insignificant and invisible. Feel the contrast between their elevated status and your lowly position.

- Hold this image for a moment, and remember that both of you possess the same basic goodness. You both have the same human heart, the same capacity for love and suffering, the same inherent worth.

- Now switch the roles. See yourself as the elevated one and them as the beggar. Again, remember that your basic worth is the same regardless of external circumstances.

- Finally, imagine the whole scene dissolving into a cloud of multicolored pixels and rest in the space that remains for a moment.

This practice helps you see beyond social hierarchies and status differences to the fundamental equality of all human beings.

14. Beyond hope and fear

When you stop trying to win the attractiveness game and instead focus on developing your authentic self, something magical happens. You develop a quality that is beyond competition or

comparison.

This isn't arrogance or showing off. It is the natural confidence that comes from knowing your own worth without needing external validation.

Much dating behavior is driven by hope (maybe this person will like me) and fear (what if they reject me). This creates an exhausting emotional roller coaster where your self-worth depends on other people's responses to you.

When you develop genuine charm, you get off this roller coaster. You are interested in connection, but you don't need validation to feel good about yourself. This paradoxically makes you much more attractive because people can sense that you're not needy or desperate.

This charm isn't something you have to build from scratch. It's something you already possess but have been covering up with insecurity and performance. Think about times when you've felt completely comfortable and confident:

- Talking about something you're passionate about
- Helping someone with a problem you know how to solve
- Being with close friends who accept you completely
- Engaging in an activity where you feel skilled and relaxed

In those moments, you're naturally charming because you're not trying to be anything other than yourself. This is the quality you want to discover and rediscover in all your interactions.

Practical charm

Here's what this looks like in dating and relationships:

You're genuinely curious about people rather than trying to impress them. You ask questions because you actually want to know the answers, not because you're following some conversation strategy.

You're comfortable with silence and don't feel the need to constantly entertain or be entertained.

You share your authentic opinions and interests even if they're

not cool or widely popular.

You're willing to be vulnerable about your fears, struggles, and imperfections.

You give genuine compliments based on what you appreciate about someone, not what you think they want to hear.

You set boundaries kindly but firmly when someone treats you poorly.

You're generous with your attention and care without keeping score of what you get back.

You can disagree with someone without trying to prove them wrong or win the argument.

You celebrate other people's successes without feeling diminished by them.

You admit when you're wrong and apologize sincerely when you've hurt someone.

Contemplations for Part Three

On attractiveness

- How much time and energy do I spend trying to be attractive to others?
- What would change about my dating life if attractiveness weren't a factor?
- When have I been attracted to someone's deeper character or energy rather than conventional male or female attractiveness?

On competition

- How do I feel when I see friends with more attractive partners than mine?
- Do I treat dating like a marketplace where I'm trying to get the best deal?
- What would it feel like to completely stop comparing myself to others?

On basic goodness

- Can I recognize my own inherent worth regardless of external validation?
- What would it feel like to approach someone from confidence rather than neediness?
- How might my relationships change if I saw everyone as fundamentally worthy of love?

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PART FOUR: AGENDA AND MYSTERY

Love is the master astrologer.
It gazes into the mysteries.
There may be explanations, but silence is better.
The pen became a writer,
Yet it broke when it wished to write about Love.
— Rumi

15. The last great enemy

Now you've learned to approach relationships without violence, moved beyond petty game-playing, and stopped treating people as commodities in a marketplace of attractiveness. As a result, you probably experienced deeper connections and more authentic interactions.

But there is one final obstacle, the subtlest: the tendency to use relationships to fill an existential void or to follow an unconscious script about what where your life is supposed to go, the biological drive that turns love into a project.

This isn't just about wanting kids or sex. It's using relationships to fill an inner void, prove one's worth, or follow a life script. These urges feel natural, but left unchecked, they undermine authentic connection.

The agenda

Even when you're approaching relationships with kindness, honesty, and genuine care, you might still be unconsciously driven by agendas that prevent authentic love:

- Using relationships to escape loneliness
- Following unstated assumptions about what relationships should become
- Trying to complete yourself through another person
- Pursuing a certain kind of relationship because you think you *should*, given your age

These motivations aren't necessarily bad, but they create conditional love, love that depends on getting a particular thing or arrangement from the other person.

The trap of spiritual materialism

There is also a risk of turning the practices in this book into another form of performance or achievement. You might catch yourself thinking: "I'm more evolved than other people because I practice nonviolent communication" or "I am going to find a more conscious partner than my friends have."

Chögyam Trungpa warned his students repeatedly:

Ego is able to convert everything to its own use, even spirituality... When we have learned all the tricks and answers of the spiritual game, we automatically try to imitate spirituality, since real involvement would require the complete elimination of ego.

The last thing the ego wants, of course, is its complete elimination! Yet love is precisely that...

Fear of space

What we're all ultimately afraid of is emptiness: the possibility that there's no inherent meaning to existence, that we don't have a fixed identity, that life might not give us what we think we need to be happy.

Relationships become a way to avoid facing this existential uncertainty. If you have someone who loves you, you feel real and worthwhile. If you're single, you might feel like something is wrong with your life.

But this fear of emptiness is actually fear of freedom. When you stop needing relationships to define you or complete you, you become free to love from choice rather than neediness.

16. Everyone's agenda

Let's examine the specific ways that hidden agendas can corrupt even well-intentioned approaches to love.

Seduction as control

Even after developing genuine charm and confidence, there's a

temptation to use these qualities strategically to get what you want from people.

The problem isn't having preferences or trying to be attractive. The problem is approaching relationships with a manipulative mindset, seeing the other person as a prize to be won rather than a human being to connect with.

True attraction can't be forced or manufactured. When you try to seduce someone into loving you, you're essentially trying to trick them into choosing something they wouldn't choose if they saw the situation clearly.

Attachment to an outcome

You might catch yourself thinking in terms of relationship "success" and "failure":

- If someone wants to date you exclusively, that's success.
- If they just want to be friends, that's failure.
- If a relationship leads to marriage, that's success.
- If you break up, that's failure.

This outcome-focused thinking will prevent you from appreciating what is actually happening in your relationships. Maybe a friendship uncomplicated by sexuality is exactly what both of you need. Maybe that breakup freed you both to find better matches.

When you're attached to specific outcomes, you can't respond authentically to what's actually unfolding. You are just trying to have it your way.

The beautiful wedding fantasy

A culture of elaborate weddings treats marriage as the ultimate relationship achievement. Social media are full of engagement photos, wedding planning, and couples going very public. This reinforces the idea that finding "the one" and getting married is what life is all about.

But marriage is a legal and social contract. It doesn't guarantee happiness, harmony, or lasting love. Many married people are

lonely and unfulfilled. Many unmarried people have rich, meaningful lives full of love.

The pressure to find your “soulmate” and have a fairy-tale wedding can prevent you from appreciating the relationships you actually have.

Also, you will almost certainly be happier resisting your parents’ pressure to marry and have children. You and your partner are the ones who will be the most affected by those decisions, so you should make this kind of decision without any interference at all.

Sexual magic and spiritual materialism

Some people try to use sexual energy to manifest specific outcomes: finding the perfect partner, getting an ex back, or achieving material goals. This treats sexuality as a tool for getting what you want rather than as an expression of love.

Margot Anand, an Osho disciple, claims that “sexual magic” can help you achieve:

- Personal healing and transformation
- New love relationships
- Greater intimacy and harmony in existing relationships
- Material manifestations such as financial abundance, a new home, or a new job

This approach misses the point entirely. As Rumi taught:

The soul and the body have separate burdens and need separate attention. For if you bind a burden on Jesus, you leave the donkey in the pasture. Do not make the body do what the soul can, and do not place a heavy burden on the soul which the body can carry easily.

If you want a better job, update your resume and develop your skills. If you want a house, save money and improve your credit. Don’t debase your sexual energy for material goals.

Becoming a relationship guru

If you’ve had some success with the approaches in this book, you might be tempted to start giving advice to friends or even teaching

workshops about “conscious dating” and the like.

This is dangerous territory. As Chögyam Trungpa warned his students:

It is too early for you to collect disciples... You may be hoping that you will be invited to more little clubs and gatherings by your protégés or friends, who are impressed with you. The point is that you have to give up any such possibility; otherwise, you could become an egomaniac.

Real wisdom about love comes from lived experience and ongoing practice, not from attending workshops. Be suspicious of anyone who claims to have figured out love or who wants to teach others how to do it.

The objectification of online dating

Dating apps and websites promise to use scientific algorithms to find your perfect match based on compatibility metrics. This treats love like a consumer choice that can be optimized through data analysis.

But research shows that the factors that determine relationship success (how you interact together, how you handle conflict, what circumstances you face) can’t be predicted from the kinds of information available on dating profiles.

The emphasis on screening potential partners through photos and profiles actually works against meaningful connection. People spend *six times* as much time evaluating profiles online as they do actually meeting people in person. *Six times!* Get off your butt and go meet someone in person already!

Digital detox for dating

For one month, limit your use of dating apps and social media related to relationships:

- Delete dating apps or only check them once per week
- Unfollow all accounts that trigger comparison or insecurity
- Don’t post about your dating life or check your ex’s profiles
- When you meet someone new, resist the urge to immediately

research them online

Instead, focus on:

- Meeting people through shared activities and interests
- Having face-to-face conversations without immediately looking for romantic potential
- Developing friendships without trying to turn them into something else
- Being fully present in your current relationships rather than looking for better options

Notice how this affects your mental state and the quality of your connections.

Heartbreak

When you experience unrequited love, it's easy to romanticize the suffering and see it as proof of the depth of your feelings. You might hold onto heartbreak because it feels more meaningful than letting go.

But heartbreak is actually a form of attachment. If you truly love someone, you want what's best for them, even if that means they're happier without you.

Real love asks: "Do I want this person to be with me, or do I want them to be happy?" If your love is conditional on them choosing you, it's not actually love, it's neediness dressed up in romantic language. By all means let go of it.

17. The purpose of sex

To understand why sexual relationships can become so compulsive and agenda-driven, it helps to understand what sex is actually for from an evolutionary perspective. You may assume that sex exists for reproduction, but this isn't the whole picture.

The paradox of sexual reproduction

If the only goal were to reproduce as efficiently as possible, sexual reproduction is actually a terrible strategy. Asexual reproduction is much more efficient:

- Bacteria can reproduce in 20 minutes by simply splitting in two.
- Fungi can produce millions of spores without needing a partner.
- Some plants and animals can clone simply themselves.

Sexual reproduction is complicated, risky, and requires finding a partner. So why did it evolve?

The diversity advantage

According to the evolutionary biologist Edward O. Wilson, sex exists primarily to create genetic diversity within species. When environmental conditions change (climate shift, new diseases, food shortages), genetically diverse populations are more likely to survive because at least some individuals will be adapted to the new conditions.

Asexual species are genetically uniform, so they tend to either survive environmental changes completely or die out completely. Sexual species, with their genetic diversity, are more likely to have some members survive any particular challenge.

This means that sexuality fundamentally exists not for reproduction per se, but for adaptability and diversity. This insight has profound implications for how we think about relationships:

All humans are genetically unique, but made from the same basic materials. Your particular combination of genes isn't special. It's just one random arrangement of genetic material that you more or less have in common with your community.

There's no "best" type of person to reproduce with. Fitness depends entirely on environmental conditions, which change unpredictably.

The obsession with finding the "perfect" partner based on fixed criteria works against the principle of diversity.

This suggests that we have a much wider range of potential partners than we might think, and that our rigid preferences about who we *should* be with or how a relationship *should* progress can easily work against our actual wellbeing.

From this broadened perspective, it is very worthwhile examining

why we are looking for a partner, or what should be expected of our current partner.

Beyond reproduction

Since you have access to birth control and (assuming, for now) aren't trying to maximize your genetic legacy, you can approach sexuality based on what actually serves love and connection rather than what served your ancestors' reproductive success.

This means you can:

- Choose a partner based on genuine affection rather than conventional markers
- Explore different relationship structures if they work better for your situation
- Value intimacy and connection over fertility and status
- See sexuality as a celebration of life rather than a biological imperative

18. Beyond the agenda

The alternative to agenda-driven relationships is what we'll call *mystery*, approaching love with complete openness to whatever wants to emerge rather than trying to make specific things happen.

Mystery doesn't mean playing hard to get or being deliberately unclear about your intentions. It means recognizing that love itself is fundamentally mysterious. You can't predict it, control it, or manufacture it.

You can create conditions that support love (developing your capacity for kindness, honesty, and presence), but you can't force it to appear or guarantee that it will look the way you expect. It is mystery because of diversity: it favors no particular form, and can therefore take any form.

The quality of not knowing

Mystery means approaching each relationship with genuine curiosity about what this particular connection has to offer, rather than trying to fit it into preconceived categories.

Maybe this person will become a lifelong partner. Maybe they'll be a friend who teaches you something important. Maybe you'll share a brief but meaningful connection and then move on. All of these possibilities are valuable if you are open to them.

Unconditional love

The deepest mystery is unconditional love, caring for someone's wellbeing regardless of what they can or will give in return, of what form that will take, or how long it will last.

Unconditional love is both utterly practical (it creates more trust and intimacy) and completely impractical (it doesn't guarantee you'll get what you want).

The broken heart of the warrior

Paradoxically, this open-hearted approach to love often includes a quality of sadness or heartbreak. When you love unconditionally, you feel the pain of separation, the fragility of all relationships, the impossibility of controlling outcomes.

This isn't a problem to be solved. It's an indication that your heart is open, the true, raw flavor of your own heart. As the Shambhala teachings explain:

When you walk into this world of reality, the greater or cosmic world, you will find the way to rule your world — but, at the same time, you will also find a deep sense of aloneness. It is possible that this world could become a palace or a kingdom to you, but as its king or queen, you will be a monarch with a broken heart.

This broken-heartedness is not despair, it is the natural result of loving in a world where nothing lasts forever. It makes you more compassionate, more present, and ultimately more capable of deep connection.

19. Four mysteries of love

Ineffability

Love can't be fully described or understood intellectually. You can talk about it, study it, and analyze it, but the actual experience of loving and being loved is beyond words.

This is why relationship advice often feels inadequate. Love is not a

problem to be solved or a skill to be mastered. It is a mystery to be experienced.

As the ancient Indian text Nārada Bhakti Sūtra says:

The nature of love is inexpressible in words. It is like a dainty dish tasted by a mute person. It finds expression very rarely in some worthy soul.

D.H. Lawrence wrote about this in his poem *The Mess of Love*: the moment you declare your love and it is “an understood thing,” it becomes “a cold egg” between partners, in other words it loses its vitality and becomes stale and predictable.

The New Testament puts it this way:

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

— 1 Corinthians 13:8-10

In plain language: love is perfection, but even prophets and learned theologians (in our world, also experts and professionals) are powerless to describe it. It cannot be known intellectually in any definitive way. Yet love is self-evident. Definitions, contrived and only partially true, fall away.

Elusiveness

Love cannot be grasped or possessed. The more you try to capture it or control it, the more it slips away. This is challenging for your generation, which has grown up with the idea that you should be able to get what you want through effort and strategy. But love operates by different rules.

You can't make someone love you. You can't prevent someone from falling out of love with you. You can't guarantee that love will last or predict when it will appear.

Oneness

When love is present, the usual sense of separation between self and other begins to dissolve. You start to care about your partner's wellbeing as much as your own. Their joy becomes your joy, their pain becomes your pain. This isn't loss of identity or unhealthy

codependence. It's recognition of your fundamental interconnectedness with all life.

Susan Piver describes this as realizing that apparently ordinary experiences, such as “being caressed by the wind unexpectedly” are actually moments of intimacy with the universe itself. Love is already present if you know how to recognize it.

Fulfillment

Love is already complete. You don't need to achieve it, earn it, or find it. It's your natural state when you're not blocking it with fear, agenda, or performance. This means that even loneliness, heartbreak, and rejection can be expressions of love if you approach them with an open heart.

I want a heart torn to bits so that I may give a full account of pain
and longing.
— Rumi

So even love's pain is fulfilled in its own way. It lets you taste the warrior's broken heart.

Fulfillment isn't getting what you want, it's appreciating the vastness that is already here. When you stop trying to improve your situation and start accepting it fully, you discover that nothing was actually missing.

Too often we have been conditioned to see life as a series of problems to be solved and goals to be achieved. Love operates differently. It is not something you accomplish. It is something you allow.

20. Magical practices

Here are specific practices to help you embody these qualities in your daily life.

Aimlessness

We brush our teeth and comb our hair daily. Discipline can be as simple as that. It is not goal oriented; it is just the normal care of our life. We do not have an agenda of having our teeth brushed or our hair combed. Now perform every act in the same spirit: do everything for its own sake, as its own reward.

Thy human right is for activity only, never for the resultant fruit of actions. Do not consider thyself the creator of the fruits of thy activities; neither allow thyself attachment to inactivity.

— Bhagavad-Gītā (2:47-48)

Plausible deniability

If you have ever engaged in courtship with anyone (whether pursuing or being pursued), you may intuitively have used a device called plausible deniability. Instead of saying I want to marry you, or I want to sleep with you (let alone *I love you*), you invite the other person to some innocuous activity, such as eating ice cream or playing at the bowling alley. Likewise when accepting or rejecting the offer, you need not mention the topic of love, sex, or marriage. While this way seems less than straightforward, it offers several advantages. In a society where violence is prevalent, or if deceit and distrust are major concerns, it is not as blunt, and may work to lower the other person's initial distrust. With regards to pettiness, this reassures the other of your propriety. It is like having good table manners. And if vanity is of great concern, you refrain from expressing too much interest in the other. Doing so, you artfully prevent this person from seeing you as unattractive:

I know of a man whose beloved was completely friendly and at ease with him; but if he had disclosed by the least gesture that he was in love, the beloved would have become as remote as the Pleiades, whose stars hang so high in heaven. It is a sort of statesmanship that is required in such cases; the party concerned was enjoying the pleasure of his loved one's company intensely and to the last degree, but if he had so much as hinted at his inner feelings he would have attained but a miserable fraction of the beloved's favour, and endured into the bargain all the arrogance and caprice of which love is capable.

— Ibn Ḥazm (994–1064) in his treatise *The Ring of the Dove*

Beyond that, practicing plausible deniability also preserves mystery, a magical quality of love and of ourselves. Not only is it not devious or underhanded, it actually makes for elegant communication. As the Shambhala teachings suggest:

The way of exercising inscrutability is that you don't spell out the truth... When you spell out the truth you are spending your capital while no one gets any profit. It becomes undignified, a giveaway... Truth is generated from its environment; in that way it becomes a powerful reality.

Eye gazing

With someone you trust (this could be a romantic partner, close friend, or family member), try this practice adapted from the Sufi tradition:

- Sit facing each other in a quiet place.
- Look directly into each other's eyes for 2–4 minutes.
- Don't talk or try to communicate anything specific.
- Just be present with whatever arises: discomfort, giggles, sadness, love.
- If you feel comfortable, you can hold hands or place a hand on each other's heart.
- Try to breathe in rhythm with each other.

This practice creates profound intimacy because it requires complete presence and vulnerability. It's hard to maintain a persona or performance when you're looking directly into someone's eyes for an extended period.

Will Johnson, who studied this practice, describes what happens:

Closer, ever closer, you feel your consciousness and energies starting to dance and commingle with your friend, until eventually you arrive at a place of such closeness and intimacy that you realize that you don't feel separate from your friend anymore...

A warning: This practice can be emotionally intense and should only be done with people you trust completely. It can also be misused by manipulative people, so be careful about who you practice with.

Be a warrior with a broken heart

Practice staying open-hearted even when you're disappointed or hurt.

The next time someone rejects you, doesn't write back, or breaks up with you:

- Feel the pain fully without trying to escape it through

distraction, substances, or immediate rebound relationships.

- Resist the urge to close your heart or become cynical.
- See if you can find compassion for the other person's situation and choices.
- Look for what this experience can teach you about love and yourself
- Appreciate that your ability to be hurt is actually evidence of your capacity to love

Susan Piver interviewed many people about their experiences of heartbreak and found that most remembered it not with bitterness but with “melancholy and a sense of sweetness... They almost missed that heightened state of feeling.”

The Shambhala teachings describe this as the state of “a monarch with a broken heart”:

This kind of aloneness is painful, but at the same time, it is beautiful and real. Out of such painful sadness, a longing and a willingness to work with others will come naturally.

21. Unconditional confidence

True confidence doesn't depend on external validation, successful relationships, or any particular outcome. It is confidence in your basic goodness as a human being, regardless of the circumstances.

It has been said that everyone possesses the potentiality to be confident. When we speak of confidence here we refer to enlightened confidence — not to confidence in something, but just to be *confident*. This confidence is unconditional.

— Chögyam Trungpa, *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*

This isn't about being mysterious or hard to read. It's about being so comfortable with yourself that you don't need to perform or pretend. You are who you are, no apology, no explanation.

The warrior doesn't have to struggle. A sense of struggle is not the style of inscrutability.

— Chögyam Trungpa, *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*

This doesn't mean you never face challenges in relationships. It means you don't fight against reality or try to force outcomes. When

someone doesn't want to date you, you don't struggle to convince them. When a relationship ends, you don't struggle to hold onto it.

When you are single, you don't struggle against loneliness as a problem to be solved. Instead, you respond to whatever situation you are in with presence and appropriate action, without the extra layer of mental struggle that comes from wanting things to be different.

Contemplations for Part Four

On the agenda

- What do I hope to get from romantic relationships, and how might these expectations limit authentic connection?
- How would my dating life change if I approached it without any agenda other than authentic connection?

On mystery

- What would it feel like to love someone without needing them to love me back?
- Can I appreciate the mystery of another person and not try to figure them out completely?
- How might I respond differently to uncertainty in relationships if I saw it as part of love's natural mystery?

On heartbreak

- What has heartbreak taught me about the nature of love?
- Can I see being hurt as evidence of my capacity to love?
- How can I honor my own pain and also wish the best for someone when I am hurt?

On fulfillment

- Is it possible that I already have everything I need, right now?
- How could my relationships change if I approached them from contentment rather than from lack?

CONCLUSION

You stand at the threshold of adulthood with more opportunities for connection than any generation in history, and also more complexity and confusion about how it all works.

This book (really a digest of a much more complex work) offers you a map for navigating that complexity with wisdom rather than following cultural scripts or biological impulses. You've learned to recognize the four great enemies of love and go past them: gentleness, grace, charm, and mystery.

These aren't personality traits you either have or don't have. They are qualities that emerge naturally when you stop letting fear and conditioning drive your relationships.

The practices in this book require courage. It takes courage to be vulnerable when everyone around you is performing. It takes courage to treat people with respect when hookup culture encourages callousness. It takes courage to value character over conventional attractiveness when social media reward the superficial. It takes courage to love without guarantees when you are told to optimize everything.

But this courage pays off in authentic connections that many people never experience. When you show up as your real self, you attract people who actually like who you are.

When you approach relationships without violence or manipulation, you create safety that allows real intimacy. When you stop chasing status symbols and start appreciating people's humanity, you discover beauty everywhere.

To be honest, while that is the truth it is also not obvious at all. *Getting results* doesn't happen automatically. It is rather that change happens gradually in your approach, in the people you associate with and don't, and in the way relationships develop or do not. It's a long-term thing.

This isn't just about your personal happiness. Every time you choose authenticity over performance, you give permission for

others to do the same. Every time you respond to conflict with curiosity rather than defensiveness, you model a better way. Every time you love someone without trying to possess them, you contribute to a culture where love can flourish.

The choice is yours. Every generation has the opportunity to revolutionize how human beings relate to each other. You have access to wisdom from across cultures and centuries, combined with unprecedented freedom to create relationships that serve love rather than biological or social programming.

You can keep following the patterns that create loneliness, competition, and superficial connections. Or you can become part of a movement toward relationships based on genuine care, mutual respect, and the recognition of our shared humanity. The world badly needs authentic lovers — people who have done the inner work to love of not causing harm, people who can create islands of sanity in a culture that often promotes the opposite.

You have everything you need to begin right now. You don't need to find the perfect partner, achieve certain life goals, or wait until you've healed all your wounds. You can start by bringing more honesty, kindness, and presence to whatever relationships you already have.

You were born with potential. You were born with goodness and trust. You were born with ideals and dreams. You were born with greatness.

You are not meant for crawling, so don't. You were born with wings. Your ability to love is those wings. Learn to use them and fly. The time to learn is now.

May your relationships be a source of growth, joy, and deep connection. May you find the courage to love authentically in a world that all too often rewards pretense. May you contribute to creating the kind of culture you want to live in.

May all beings be happy.

May all beings be free from suffering.

May all beings delight in each other's goodness.

May all beings enjoy the equanimity of love as oneness.

You can converse with *The Authentic Lover*'s AI avatar by following the instructions at this link:

[https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/dh5uk8h7qvzeyssdsbghz/AJ-aPq_7nsfBQRyyWQAqz5E?
rlkey=4qjlxokkbvek509q35j7js0kv&e=3&st=tqdyyhpi&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/dh5uk8h7qvzeyssdsbghz/AJ-aPq_7nsfBQRyyWQAqz5E?rlkey=4qjlxokkbvek509q35j7js0kv&e=3&st=tqdyyhpi&dl=0)

